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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIJING 024844

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TAGS: [SCUL](#) [PGOV](#) [CH](#)  
SUBJECT: CONFUCIUS SAYS: STUDY CHINESE AND SUPPORT CHINA  
(C-TN6-00970)

REF: STATE 114006

Classified By: Political Internal Unit Chief Susan Thornton.  
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

1. (C) Confucius Institutes are designed to promote the study of Chinese language and culture, thereby increasing familiarity with and support for China internationally, according to Xu Lin, Director General of the Office of the Chinese Language Council International (Hanban). Hanban, which is in charge of the 109 Confucius Institutes that have been established in 46 countries, is unable to meet the extremely high demand for Chinese language training overseas because it is seriously underfunded, Xu complained, having only 50 staff and a budget of USD 25 million. Hanban is affiliated with the Ministry of Education, which supplies its staff, and its budget and plans are approved by a council of 12 Chinese government entities led by State Councilor Chen Zhili. Xu and the author of a recent book on China's "soft power" both downplayed any connection between Confucius Institutes and China's aspirations for global influence, claiming that the foreign affairs bureaucracy is uninvolved in the poorly coordinated and underfunded effort. End Summary.

Confucius Institutes: A "Platform" for Promoting Chinese

2. (C) Xu Lin, Director General of the Office of the Chinese Language Council International (Hanban) that runs China's Confucius Institutes overseas, recently told Poloffs that such Institutes are "very hot" right now. As of October 2006, 109 Confucius Institutes have been established in 46 countries and Hong Kong and many more are on the way. Hanban estimates that 30 million people worldwide want to study Chinese. In the United States, 12 Confucius Institutes have been established and more than 2,500 secondary schools want to offer Chinese language training, Xu said.

3. (C) Confucius Institutes, according to Ms. Xu, are "platforms" for providing instruction in Chinese language and culture to overseas audiences. Once a local college, secondary school, or other institution approaches a Chinese Embassy or Consulate to express interest in establishing a Chinese language program, they are put in touch with Hanban to discuss the possible establishment of a Confucius Institute. Hanban is extremely flexible in working with local partners, Xu said, and can provide both teachers and instructional materials as required, but local organizations can provide their own if desired. According to sample agreements provided by Ms. Xu, both Hanban and the local partner must agree to provide financial and other support to Confucius Institutes. Hanban will provide up to USD 100,000 for initial start-up costs and may supply and

fund teachers as well as a Deputy Director. Local partners are responsible for providing the physical space for the Confucius Institute, as well as its Director, and must agree to certain parameters regarding the institute's activities. One example of Hanban's flexibility, Xu said, is that, in Chicago, the Confucius Institute is run by the local Department of Education, but in New York, is run by the China Institute, a private organization that has a relationship with Shanghai Normal University, which provides the Institute's teachers.

Strategy: Study Chinese, Support China  
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14. (C) The goal of the Confucius Institutes is to promote the study of Chinese language and enhance understanding of China, and thereby hopefully increase the number of people who support (or at least do not dislike) China, Ms. Xu asserted. She denied any "political element" to the institutes, stressing that their only mission is education. The institutes do, however, help foreigners interested in doing business in China by inviting experts to give lectures on topics such as Chinese business law. Even though many people want to study Chinese, not many can actually visit China, so the Confucius Institutes become their "window" on the language and culture, allowing them to develop a "relationship" with China, Xu explained.

15. (C) Xu said there is no specific plan regarding the number or locations of future Confucius Institutes, remarking that establishment of Confucius Institutes is a long-term strategy that will be supported "as long as is necessary." Given that demand for institutes currently far exceeds Hanban's ability to establish them, Ms. Xu said her

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current "strategy" is simply to work as far down her list of organizations that have requested institutes as time and funding allow.

Challenges  
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16. (C) Despite the popularity of Confucius Institutes, Ms. Xu outlined a number of challenges that hinder her work. Although Hanban is officially a "non-profit NGO affiliated with the Ministry of Education," it is clearly an arm of the Chinese government. The problem, Ms. Xu said, is her work is overseen both by the Ministry of Education and the "Chinese Language Council International," which is comprised of 12 Chinese Government Ministries and agencies and chaired by State Councilor Chen Zhili. Although the Ministry of Education provides all of her staff, and she herself is a career Ministry of Education bureaucrat, Xu said all of Hanban's plans and budgets must be approved by Chen Zhili's council, which includes: State Council General Office, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance, State Council Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Culture, State Administration of Radio Film and Television (China Radio International), State Press and Publications Administration, State Council Information Office and the State Language Work Committee. Coordinating among so many actors is "a major headache," Xu stated. The biggest headache, she said, is the Ministry of Finance, who she bothers "every day" for more money.

17. (C) Ms. Xu complained that Hanban is seriously underfunded: with a staff of 50 and a budget of only USD 25 million, she has neither the time nor the money to come anywhere close to meeting demand for Confucius Institutes. (Note: Xu stressed that the above figure accounts only for Hanban's budget. The Chinese Government has a number of other channels for promoting the study of Chinese as a foreign language, so she had no idea the total amount of

money spent on all Chinese language and culture-related programs. End note.) Finding and training qualified teachers is another obstacle, Xu noted, as is developing curriculum and teaching materials for modern students, many of whom are not really interested in investing the effort necessary to study a language as hard as Chinese. That challenge is compounded by the fact that the Confucius Institute's teaching methods are often too "stubborn" and "traditional," adopting approaches more suited to Chinese, not foreign, students such as an emphasis on grammar and writing. A final problem, Xu said, is the disorganization of the Chinese government itself on promoting Chinese language and culture. A number of other Ministries, including Culture and Foreign Affairs, have the "authority" to do this kind of work, but none of them do so in a coordinated fashion.

#### Foreign Policy Connection

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18. (C) Confucius Institutes have nothing to do with Chinese diplomacy, Ms. Xu asserted. The Confucius Institutes have no diplomatic duties and no direct relationship with MFA. In fact, Xu stated, MFA "doesn't know a thing" about public diplomacy and education. Ms. Xu said Hanban's emphasis is on the "hardware" of establishing Confucius Institutes and providing them with the requisite teachers and books.

19. (C) In a separate conversation, freelance journalist Zhou Qing'an told poloff that even though the Chinese Government is keenly interested in promoting China's soft power, its efforts to date, including the Confucius Institutes, have been poorly coordinated and subject to internal criticism. The Confucius Institutes are running up against major funding problems, particularly in Africa, Zhou related, arguing that the Ministry of Education has not provided adequate operating funds. Some officials reportedly have even written internal reports criticizing Confucius Institutes around the world for being "dilapidated and unappealing."

10. (C) Zhou, who recently co-authored a book about soft power with Dean of the Tsinghua University School of Journalism and Communications Li Xiguang, said there was a brainstorming session at the State Council Information Office in July 2006 about how China should pursue soft power, attended by scholars, diplomats and other Government officials. The impetus for the rising interest in soft power in China is all the negative stories about China that appear in the foreign press, Zhou said. The problem, Zhou asserted, is that no agency has the lead on public diplomacy for the Chinese Government and there is no

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concerted plan. The only thing everyone agrees on is that something needs to be done to counter all the negative stories in the foreign press. Promoting culture and academic exchange is one thing, but the biggest problem is that there is no agreement on what the actual substance of Chinese soft power should be, Zhou stated.

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